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MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Address to Past Confirmants, 1949.

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CENTENNIAL RECONSECRATION SERVICE

Sunday, December 18, 1949

Address to Past Confirmants

My dear friends, I greet you all this morning with the same words with which I have greeted Confirmation Classes on Confirmation day. "Boruch haba v'shem adonai berach nuchem mi bat adonai." "Blessed be ye who come in the name of the Lord. We bless you out of the House of the Lord."

This House of the Lord, Tifereth Israel, now celebrating its 100th anniversary, is proud to welcome you, its sons and daughters, who, having been confirmed in this sanctuary in the years gone by, are now met again on this auspicious occasion at its altar to reaffirm your faith and your loyalty to the glorious ideals of immortal Israel. This sanctuary has witnessed through the years many noble and impressive sights, but none, I am sure, more noble or more impressive than this. Here is the living proof of that electric cord which binds the generations of our people, one to another - the electric cord which carries the light and the power of our faith uninterruptedly down the ages. Here is living testimonial of a covenant which was made long ago, a covenant with God which was made "La dorot olom" - for perpetual generations. I say here is living testimonial of this covenant and of its unfailing appeal and of its everlasting renewal. And I am confident that as long as men and women will feel moved, as you are this morning, to recall with gratitude and with thanksgiving the spirit of your Confirmation day, and lovingly to recapture all of its sacred associations, so long will the foundations of our faith remain unshaken.

It is altogether fitting that this, your Reconsecration, be held on Chanukah, which, as the name indicates, is a festival of rededication. For the spirit of both occasions is one and the same. In the days of the Maccabees more than 21 centuries ago Jews assembled in Jerusalem to rededicate their temple and their own lives to the living God. They felt the need to do so. Within that little land of Judea where our forefathers lived, they had for a long time developed a way of life which differed very radically, very sharply, from that of the pagan world. Their religion was different,

their moral code was different, their attitudes toward human life and destiny were different. They were the only monotheists in the whole ancient world. They rejected all idolatry, all mythology. Among all the peoples of antiquity, they were the only ones who refused to worship the state as symbolized in emperor or king. They would not tolerate the bust of the Emperor in their Temple for above Emperor was God, who alone was worthy of adoration. And above the law of the state was the law and the supreme authority of God. The moral standard of the ancient world in the days of the Maccabees was frightfully low. It was a world in which all things belonged to the strong, the ruthless and the rapacious. Pity, compassion, charity were looked upon as marks of weakness. It was a civilization built upon brutal slavery. In bloody arenas men and beasts were pitted one against the other for the delight of the mobs who were insensate to human suffering and could not conceive of the dignity and the sanctity of human life, least of all, the life of the slave or the poor or the aged or the weak. The pagan gods were themselves highly immoral and gross immorality defiled the lives of society.

Now, our ancestors in those days and for a long time before that had a totally different standard of life. Their Torah had taught them justice and love and charity and brotherhood and neighborliness and the peace and the protection of the weak and the needy and the dispossessed of life. They were taught moral cleanness and moral sobriety and moral discipline. That was their way of life. And the Syrian Greeks who ruled over Palestine in the 2nd century before the Common Era at the time of the Maccabees, were determined to destroy this defiant Jewish way of life, even as the Nazis in our day were determined to destroy a civilization which they looked upon, and correctly so, as essentially the product of the Jewish genius. They feared and resented that little island of spiritual religion and morality in a sea of heathendom. They feared and resented this stiffnecked little people who, by insisting upon being different, disturbed their peace of mind, menaced their "gleichschaltung" of their far-flung empire and the survival of their kind of a world. And so they pro-

hibited the teaching of Judaism. They closed down all the schools and all the synagogues. They forbade all observance of Jewish custom and tradition. They invaded and defiled the Temple in Jerusalem. They erected images of the pagan gods there, and by threat of torture and death, forced many Jews to worship them. And Jews revolted.

There were Jews who loved their way of life too dearly to submit; Jews who would rather die and remain loyal to the covenant of their fathers than live. They hated this pagan might even when it appeared to be invincible. They despised that culture even when it appeared all decked out in all splendor and glamor because they knew the rottenness at its core, the human defilement and corruption which it involved. And so one family of a noble father and five brave sons raised the standard of revolt and gathered around them at first a small handful of followers. They were few in number; they lacked the arms which the Syrian Greeks possessed, armored elephants and their death-dealing chariots, but theirs was the strength of the weak whose fortress is the Lord. And they fought bravely and for many years, and fought through to victory. They drove the enemy from their country. They recaptured the Temple, cleansed it and rededicated it. They kindled the lights anew in the darkened sanctuary, and they proceeded to rededicate themselves also to the God of Israel, the "El rachun v'hamun", the God of mercy and of compassion, the God of justice and of love, the Father of all men.

And so, Judaism was saved, and so the civilization of mankind was saved for had Judaism perished in that day, its great ethical code would have perished with it. Neither Judaism would have survived, and Christianity, which sprang from Judaism a century and a half later, would never have come into being, and the whole course of civilization would have been totally different.

Now, my dear friends, why do I repeat this story which must be well known to you? First, because this is Chanukah and it is a glorious story that bears re-telling often. But more so, in order to bring home this thought which I would like to share with you on this morning of reconsecration. The significance of Chanukah is not that an altar

or a building made out of stone, which had been defiled, had been rededicated. God does not dwell in physical structures, and God is not worshipped upon physical altars. It is in the inner sanctuary of the heart where God is worshipped.

X The significance of Chanukah is that there were brave hearts in those days, men and women who were ready to fight and, if necessary, to die for their faith and their convictions, despite might, despite the multitude of men. First a few, and then by contagion, many more - men and women who were ready to defend spiritual ideals to the utmost. The Jewish people has survived throughout the ages because in all ages whenever our faith was threatened either by persecution, as in the ages of darkness, or when it was threatened in ages of freedom and enlightenment by indifference and assimilation, there were always faithful and loyal men and women who succumbed ~~not~~ neither to the persecution of the persecutor nor to the blandishments of assimilation and the surface glamor of alien cultures - men and women who remained steadfast and true to the basic religious principles of Judaism, to the vision of the synagogue, to the spirit of saint, seer and prophet, to the prayers, customs and noble traditions of our people, to the Jewish way of life.

Now this Temple of ours in whose beautiful precincts we are gathered this morning needs no rededication. Whether in this majestic edifice where we now assemble or in the humbler ones where our fathers before us worshipped through these 100 years, this Temple was never profaned by pagan worship. Always it remained consecrated to the faith of our people. Always men and women came to worship here the one true God. Here the immemorial prayers of our people were offered. Here its doctrines were propounded. Here its holidays were observed. Here its inspiration was transmitted. Here men and women came with the burden of their hearts, with their sorrows or their hopes, seeking grace or consolation. Here our children were taught and here they were confirmed in the faith of their fathers. This Temple needs no rededication.

For more than 100 years now it has been true to its mission and to its divine purpose. But what about us? What about you? Echoing in my heart at this moment are the words of the great emancipator, Lincoln: "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great tasks remaining before us." The great task, the unfinished task, the Macabean task. And what is this task? Why, it is to bring your lives, our lives, as far as possible into harmony with the pledge which you made on your Confirmation day. "I consecrate my life to the religion of Israel- With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might, I will strive to further the holy purposes of Judaism."

Now, in this quiet and solemn hour, may we not each of us examine his heart and in utmost candor ask himself, how far have I really lived up to that pledge - that pledge which was made on that echoing day when consecrated and uplifted, you stepped with glowing hearts into the world of young manhood and womanhood.

As a rule, my dear friends, the world is too much with us and we haven't the time to check up on ourselves. The tides of life sweep all too swiftly, and oftentimes, to havens least desired. The years of care and quest take their toll of us, of our dreams and of our high resolves. We all change, certainly outwardly, but many of us also change inwardly - some to greater depths and fuller maturity; others, unfortunately, wasting and desolation.

During the years of my ministry I have known many boys and girls in their Confirmation years and later on, in their college years, and oftentimes/^{as} I looked at them, I would catch my breath at beholding them - so full of the beautiful radiance and expectancy of youth was in them, so flowering in promise were they - in idealism, in human warmth. And then I met them years later, and it seemed as if a glory had passed out of their lives. Their lives had been seemingly stripped bare of all beauty, of all exaltation, of all the mystery, the glorious mystery of expectancy. Lives which had become set and dowdy and quenched in unremitting routine, comfortably adjusted, narrowed to a little circle of like-minded lotus eaters, and my heart has grieved for them. Somewhere along the road they had missed out.

On the other hand, it has been my privilege through the years to know men and women, some of them on the downgrade of the years, who are an ever lasting source of happy amazement to me because of the enkindling eagerness of their spirits. It was as if the fresh winds of God were sweeping always through their souls. Men and women always reaching out, always reaching out to taste the manna of God, to serve others, to improve themselves; men and women who are not necessarily crusaders, but vibrant human beings, alive, who in their quiet ways nevertheless suggested the urgency of mission and purposeful living. And seeing them I always had the feeling as though in some secret corner of their lives, some deathless flower was blooming, some deathless flower, all fragrant and all their own. And I suppose this is what the Psalmist meant when he sang, ~~xxx~~ beholding such men and women in his day, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be full of sap and richness.

On this morning and in this quiet hour of introspection, it might be helpful if you would ask yourself in which of these groups have you placed your life. Have you linked up your days to significance, to purpose, to timelessness; or have you permitted life to delude you? Have you permitted life to elude you? Have you permitted life to betray you and is life still betraying you? Now that you are older than you were on Confirmation day, you have an opportunity to check upon yourselves. What have you hungered for during these years since your Confirmation, and how have you been filled? What have the years brought to you of your own fashioning, and are you satisfied? As child or parent, as wife or husband, as brother or sister, as citizen of your community, has your life manifested itself as a radiance or as a shadow? If you had your years at your command again, would you change them, and how? There are things in life which cannot be changed. The moving finger writes and having writ, moves on.

But there is much that can be changed, very much. Even now, even when it seems very late. Nothing is too late until the tired heart shall cease to palpitate, says the poet. For the human will has a sovereignty of its own, and mountains can be made to move at its unbending resolution.

Most of us, I believe, would have no objection to a repetition of the same life which we have lived from its beginning, only asking as Benjamin Franklin asked in his autobiography for "the advantages which authors have in a second edition, to correct some faults of the first". What faults would you correct if your life had a second edition? And why not begin to correct them now?

Some years ago I listened to a school master who told the story of a lamp-lighter in his native town in Scotland. He was a humble man, this lamp-lighter, and daily, when the heavy fogs settled over the town, he would go from lamppost to lamppost and kindle the lamps. No one would ever be able to see him at such time because the fog was so heavy, but everyone knew that the lamp-lighter had passed by by the lights which gleamed in his wake.

Have you been a lamp-lighter in the fog and the gloom of the world, have you been kindling the lights? If so, then you have been very faithful to your Confirmation pledge, the pledge of a people which was of old admonished to be "or la go-yim" - a light unto the nations. To bring out the prisoner from the dungeon and them who dwell in darkness into the great light. If not, why it is not too late to take up the lantern in your hand and illumine the lives of those whom you will encounter upon the way of life.

On Confirmation morning, dear friends, you pledged yourselves to "consecrate your lives to the religion of Israel, with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might, I will strive to further the holy purposes of Judaism." Have you really consecrated your lives to the religion of Israel? Have you really striven to further the holy purposes of Judaism? In what manner? How?

Well, there are two ways in which one strives to further the holy purposes of Judaism or of any great religion. One is to live up to its spiritual ideals, to respond to its high ethical challenge, to fight the good fight for truth and justice and peace in the world, to advance always, to move to the higher levels, always marching toward amendment. To do all this it means standing alone sometimes, as the Maccabees stood alone; to

do it even if it means sacrifice at times, as they sacrificed.

That's one way to strive, to further the holy purposes of Judaism. Because the holy purposes of Judaism were never furthered by ease or indolence or indifference, but by consecration and devotion and loyalty and sacrifice. Great religions make great demands upon their followers.

And there is another way to further the holy purposes of Judaism - by fostering the institutions of Jewish life, the agencies which it had evolved through the ages to carry on its message and its mission; the synagogue, the religious school, the Jewish home, the practice of the observances, the customs, the ceremonies of Judaism which embody and symbolize its spirit and without which it remains a disembodied spirit, and Judaism cannot survive as a disembodied spirit.

Music - music is, of course, far more than the instruments which you use in playing. Music, the soul of music, the message of music, the spiritual content of music is infinitely more than the instruments of wood and brass and string which we use in a symphony. But without these instruments the message of music, the soul of music could never be imparted to anyone. Music must be played upon instruments so that men can catch its immortal message.

And it is ~~ix~~ so with religion. Religious observances, religious practices, private and public worship, beautiful ceremonies and rituals rich in tradition - why, these are the indispensable instruments for the symphony of religion. When they are neglected, the spirit of religion languishes and ultimately dies.

Have we striven - have you striven to further the holy purposes of Judaism, first by living the good life, as the prophets defined it, "to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with Thy God", and by fostering the Jewish life through faithful synagogue attendance, through the habit of private and public worship, through observances in the home, through adequate religious education of yourselves and of your children, through the support of the agencies which contribute to Jewish survival. If you have, if you are doing

these things, why then you are fulfilling the pledge of your Confirmation days. You are walking in the way of God. You are leading a consecrated life.

If not, why it is never too late to stir up the slumbering embers of faith and loyalty, and the embers still burn in you, I am sure. It is never too late to rededicate yourselves as you once did, when you stood in this sanctuary and said, "Unto the end of my life Israel's watchword shall be my guide. Sh'ma Yisroel, Adonoi Eloheinu, Adonoi Echod." "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."



The Temple

Congregation Tifereth Israel

Rabbis

Abba Hillel Silber

Julius J. Nodel Carl S. Stone

A Service of Reconsecration

of all the Men and Women who have been Confirmed

at The Temple

In the Centennial Year of The Temple

Sunday morning, December 18, 1949

ten-thirty o'clock

Reconsecration Service

Sunday, December 18, 1949

Prelude—Organ, Violin, Cello, Harp A. R. Willard, Organist
Ben Silverberg, Violinist
Charles McBride, Cellist
Diana Thomas, Harpist

Anthem—Holy, Holy, Holy (Gounod) Choir

Reading of the Service—Pages 311-326 Rabbi Julius J. Nodel
Rabbi Earl S. Stone

Solo—"Hear My Prayer" (Coombs) Mrs. Alma Babb

Address to the Past Confirmants of The Temple
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

Solo—Shomer Yisroel (Rosenblatt) Anthony Fitch

Kindling the Lights of Reconsecration Class Representatives
The instrumental trio will play during the Kindling of the Lights

Confession of Faith Past Confirmants

The Confirmation Hymn Past Confirmants

Concluding Service—Pages 365-371

Benediction

Lord What Off'ring Shall We Bring?

Lord, what off'ring shall we bring
At Thine altar when we bow?
Hearts,—the pure unsullied spring
Whence the kind affections flow.

Willing hands to lead the blind,
Heal the wounded, feed the poor;
Love, embracing all mankind;
Charity, with lib'ral store.

Teach us, O Thou heavenly King,
Thus to show our grateful mind,
This accepted off'ring bring;
Love to Thee and all mankind.

Father, See Thy Suppliant Children

Father, see Thy suppliant children
Trembling stand before Thy Throne,
To confirm the vow of Horeb,
"We will serve the Lord alone."

Thy command shall be engraven
On the tables of our heart,
Till the heart in death be broken,
Till the cord of life shall part.

When dark tempest, low'ring gather,
It will be our strength and stay,
It will be our guardian angel
Upon life's laborious way.

As a shelt'ring cloud at noontide,
As a flaming fire by night,
Through prosperity and sorrow,
It will guide our steps aright.

Till we reach the land of promise
When the toils of earth are past,
Till we sleep the sleep eternal
In the realms of peace at last.

Confession of Faith

I consecrate my life to the religion of Israel—
With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might,
I will strive to further the holy purposes of Judaism.
Unto the end of my life, Israel's watchword shall be my guide.
Sh'ma Yisroel Adonoi Elohenu Adonoi Echod.
Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is One.

Class Representatives who will kindle the Lights of Reconsecration

| | | | |
|------|---------------------------|------|-----------------------------|
| 1870 | Jennie Mautner Littman | 1920 | Selma Toffler Ehrlich |
| 1870 | Augusta Wolf Born | 1921 | Claudia Liebenthal Schock |
| 1874 | Isidore Bloom | 1922 | Florence Schonberg Bialosky |
| 1890 | Cora August Grossman | 1923 | Irving Kane |
| 1892 | Jessie Pollock Wohlgemuth | 1924 | Joy Klein Henry |
| 1894 | Belle Mahler Miller | 1925 | Betty Cohn Mintz |
| 1896 | Bertha Zsupnyik Civins | 1926 | Mildred Ginsberg Sindell |
| 1897 | Helen Einstein Bing | 1927 | Merrill Gross |
| 1898 | Leo Oppenheimer | 1928 | Dr. Elliott Glicksberg |
| 1899 | Stella Einstein Sycle | 1929 | George V. Goulder |
| 1900 | Louis Iglauer | 1930 | William Evans |
| 1901 | Doris Littman Lux | 1931 | Alan Geismer |
| 1902 | Florence Marks Moss | 1932 | Richard Bloomberg |
| 1903 | Lillian Levison Goodman | 1933 | Elizabeth Weitz Faulb |
| 1904 | Milton P. Altschul | 1934 | Lester Theodore Miller |
| 1905 | Godfrey A. Garson | 1935 | Alyce Roth Klivans |
| 1906 | Alfred L. Steuer | 1936 | Roy Unger |
| 1907 | Edith Joseph Goldsmith | 1937 | Ruth Gans Mellman |
| 1908 | Harold Thorman | 1938 | Dorothy Katz Koblitz |
| 1909 | Mina Liebenthal Felber | 1939 | Herbert Ascherman |
| 1910 | Bertram J. Krohngold | 1940 | William Luntz |
| 1911 | Irene Gross Wise | 1941 | Catherine Aub Stone |
| 1912 | Constance Mayer Haber | 1942 | Howard Gerson |
| 1913 | Irving Hexter | 1943 | Janet Neumark |
| 1914 | Malvene Sands Bialosky | 1944 | Robert Gries, Jr. |
| 1915 | Marcus Feder | 1945 | Rita Neye |
| 1916 | Stuart Halle | 1946 | Mary Galvin |
| 1917 | Jerome Curtis | 1947 | Rosalind Betsy Nebel |
| 1918 | Florence Selman Klein | 1948 | James Diener |
| 1919 | Lester Colbert | 1949 | Robert Sampliner |

Class Reunions

The Class reunions of the past confirmants will take place at the conclusion of the Service in the following places:

In Mahler Hall
1908 to 1921

In the Library
1943 to 1946

In the Parlor
1922-1923

In School Building

First Floor
1890 to 1907

Second Floor
1924 to 1930
1947 to 1949

Third Floor
1931 to 1942

Members of classes meeting in Mahler Hall are requested to use the exit to the right of the pulpit and the stairway leading down to Mahler Hall. Members of classes meeting in the Parlor are requested to use the exit to the right of the pulpit. Members of classes meeting in the School building and Library are requested to use exit left of pulpit.